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SUBJECT: LEADING MLC POLITICIAN OPTS FOR INDEPENDENCE

REF: KINSHASA 304

Classified By: PolCouns MSanderson, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Jean-Pierre Bemba's Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC) party suffered a second high-profile defection March 15 when Minister of Plan Alexis Thambwe Mwamba announced that he would run for election as an independent candidate, and resigned from the MLC and from his ministerial position. (Note: President of the National Assembly Olivier Kamitatu was the first high-visibility MLC member to inadvertently jump ship, when Bemba expelled him from the party in November for having circulated a letter suggesting to MLC parliamentarians that they should consider an alliance with rival candidate Pierre Pay Pay. End Note.)

¶2. (C) Unlike Kamitatu, however, Thambwe is pursuing a well developed and carefully laid plan (ref), having spent the last several months putting into place a network of potential independent electoral candidates in his home province of Maniema which he hopes will provide him a significant post-electoral base at both the provincial and national levels.

¶3. (C) Comment: Thambwe's departure is a serious blow to the already weakened MLC party structure, and could accelerate the fracturing of that party. Thambwe, one of several prospects for the prime ministerial position, will likely be a serious contender for the post, as he has developed and maintained cordial relations with President Kabila's PPRD party and many of his senior advisors. End comment.

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